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ABSTRACT

Designed for parents of students with physical injuries, this guide provides information to help families plan for the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Chapter 1 discusses shifting goals and expectations, including getting work experience, having friends and dating, and becoming independent. Chapter 2 addresses job exploration and planning for the future. This chapter outlines possible transition goals for high school students, what should be included in Individualized Education Programs (IEP), and stresses the need for the students and parents to take an active role in the job exploration and planning process. Tips are provided for participating in the IEP team meetings. Chapters 3 and 4 explore getting a job, barriers for people with disabilities, and employment rights included under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Chapter 5 provides suggestions for securing competitive employment, sample application letters and resumes, and steps for preparing for a job interview. Chapter 6 discusses how to evaluate job qualifications and questions employers may ask. The final two chapters describe how to build a network of adult services to meet employment and training, housing, and financial assistance needs. Each chapter includes real-life experiences of individuals with disabilities. (CR)

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When your teenager is injured

Preparing for work and adulthood

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When your teenager is injured

Preparing for work and adulthood

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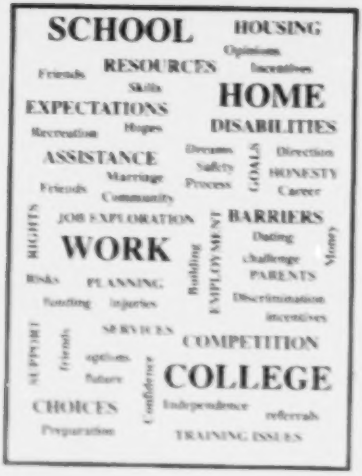

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In Appreciation

This guide was written with the expertise and help of many people. The authors especially wish to thank the members of the Family Task Force of the Research and Training Center on Rehabilitation and Childhood Trauma for their time and willingness to share their experiences and suggestions. We also thank the many teachers, counselors, administrators, and vocational specialists who contributed their time and knowledge.

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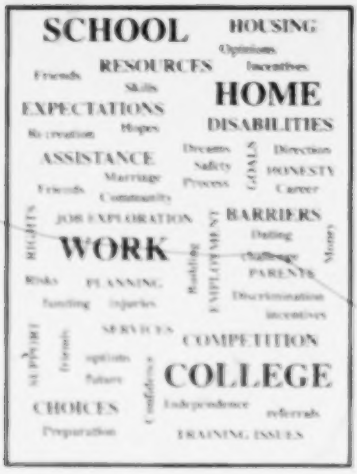

Introduction

The goal of this guide is to help families plan for the transition from adolescence to adulthood, a move that is commonly marked by the adolescent's leaving school and going to work or college.

Adolescence is a period of emerging independence. It is a time to try out new roles and responsibilities. It is a period of excitement and stress. The changes are many - physical, hormonal, social and emotional. Relationships with friends and family members change. Educational and vocational interests and goals are explored and defined. Parents begin to see signs of maturity even though childish behaviors are still present at times.

When serious injuries occur in the midst of adolescence, hopes and plans for the future may be jeopardized. Talk about the future may be put on hold. Families wait and hope for news from medical specialists about the immediate and long-term effects of injuries. New worries, choices and needs emerge, such as coping with hospitalization, adjusting to physical changes, sorting through mixed emotions, and helping siblings adjust.

Discharge from the hospital and completion of a rehabilitation program mark the end of one stage of recovery and the beginning of the next. As adolescents return home and go to school, they may need special education services, equipment such as wheelchairs or crutches, and altered schedules for classes and activities.

As the end of high school approaches, students face major decisions about continuing their education, finding employment and deciding how and where to live. The basic questions for all teenagers entering adulthood are the same. What's next? What do I want to do? What do I do best? Where will I live? How will I support myself?

These plans and decisions become more complicated for the student with a disability from an injury. Much depends on the severity of the injury, the type of disability and the progress that can be expected and achieved. Precise predictions of long-term recovery usually are not possible, especially if the adolescent has had a brain injury. Families live with many uncertainties. Reactions of worry, dismay, frustration and anger are common. Yet most families manage to move forward. Although goals and expectations may shift, progress can still be made.

Families have a critical influence in supporting or discouraging the choices and plans of their children. Most parents try to encourage independence among adolescents and young adults, yet they are also aware of the risks and try to protect them from disappointment and failure. Too often, overly pessimistic limits are set and expectations are lowered when an individual has a disability. When families and others focus on the disability, much of the individual's potential for growth, change, progress and achievement can be overlooked. The unique interests, experiences, and abilities of the individual can make life fuller and productive. These qualities often provide the strength and determination that help individuals overcome their physical, cognitive or emotional limitations.

This guide has been designed to help adolescents, young adults and their families do the following:

- assess the student's skills and interests
- organize questions
- find resources and gather information
- develop expectations and goals
- find out about training programs, schools and employers
- prepare for employment

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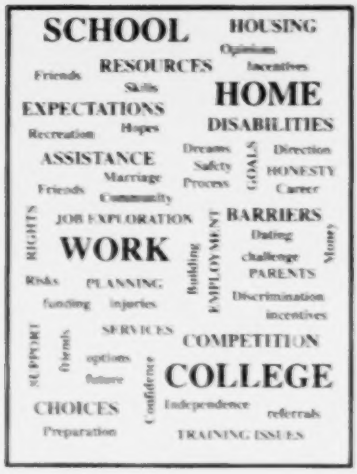
Shifting Goals and Expectations



Adolescents make critical choices during high school as they begin to think and prepare for what they want to do after graduation. Decisions about continuing education, finding a job, and moving away from home are all part of progressing from adolescence to adulthood. This progress can be more complicated for adolescents who have been recently injured. Goals may need to be changed, special services may be needed, and the extent of recovery may be uncertain.

Getting work experience

Teenagers usually begin trying out different kinds of work by age 14 or 15, through summer jobs, work after school, and volunteering. With the help of parents or through school projects, they often visit different work settings, talk to people about their jobs and read about possible careers. To the frustration of many parents, it is common for young adults to experiment with many different jobs, college majors and life styles. Young people with disabilities may have less time or opportunity to hold different jobs or meet adults who can serve as role models.

Jessie's experience:

By the time Jessie was 18, she had held 5 part-time jobs, including fast food, volunteering, waitressing, scooping ice cream and sorting mail. For a school civics assignment, she wrote a paper on careers in sales, after interviews with local business people.

Ron's experience:

By contrast, Ron's plan to work the summer when he turned 16 changed after he was in a car collision. Unable to walk, having trouble

learning new information, and often misunderstood because of his slurred speech, he spent 4 weeks in a rehabilitation program before returning to high school in the fall. Extra hours were needed after school and on weekends for homework and out-patient therapies. Minor surgery was scheduled the next summer, so he wouldn't miss more school. By age 18, he had far less work experience than Jessie although they were in many of the same classes.

Becoming independent

Teenagers learn how to be independent, organize their time, cope with failure, assess risks, travel, and manage money. The onset of a disability during adolescence may result in renewed and prolonged physical, financial and emotional dependence on others, especially family members. This is especially frustrating for adolescents whose peers are testing the limits of their emerging independence.

Jessie's experience:

With the help of an aunt, Jessie got a part-time sales job in a gift shop. Although her parents were nervous about her working and living in the city, her aunt's invitation to share her apartment convinced them to let her try it. They made it clear that they could only give her $35 a week for expenses. She had to budget her paycheck to meet expenses, including the $15 she gave to her aunt for groceries. During her free time, Jessie explored the city, learned the subway and bus system, and found many free activities that she could enjoy on her restricted budget.

Ron's experience:

After 3 months of physical therapy, Ron walked better although he still used a cane to steady his balance. His doctor agreed to refer him to a special program to evaluate his ability to drive, but his parents refused to discuss it. Since all his friends had been driving for a couple years by now, he resented asking his parents for a ride and often hitchhiked instead. Without a car, he couldn't see his friends easily or look for a job. He would not start dating again if he had to be driven by his parents.

Having friends and dating

Teenagers place great importance on relationships with peers, dating, and appearance. Friends compete with family members for attention, time and loyalty. Time spent "hanging out", listening to music, or visiting the mall may seem like wasted time to parents, but is important to teenagers to explore their interests and ideas. Teenagers are heavily influenced by their friends, often causing their parents to cross their fingers and hope for the best.

Jessie's experience:

From her part-time work experience, Jessie learned to handle responsibility and understand the consequences of her actions. Success at work and school made her feel good about herself, which contributed to her popularity with her classmates. She started dating in high school, and had a steady boyfriend during her senior year. Even then, she said she was not going to get too serious, because she needed the freedom to figure out her future. When she moved away from home, her parents were concerned about her safety, but they knew her independent spirit and experience would help her make good decisions.

Ron's experience:

Ron's parents suspected that he and his friends had been drinking the night that he was hurt, especially after finding a fake ID in his jeans. Although they liked most of his friends and knew their parents, they also knew that weekend parties got pretty rowdy. They worried especially that he could be in another accident or have a seizure if he mixed alcohol with his medications. After many months in the hospital and at home, Ron was anxious to get out again. He understood his parents' concern, but he felt like he was suffocating at home.

Planning for the future
options for training, college, and work

The transition from school to work requires teenagers to learn about themselves. Choosing a career path requires identifying not only vocational goals and interests, but also recognizing one's skills, personality traits, strengths and weaknesses.

Jessie's example:

Through her various jobs, Jessie decided she was really a "people" person. Jobs that required interaction with others were the most enjoyable and satisfying. Her immediate goal after high school graduation was to get a sales job in a clothing store and work up to a manager's position. She used her father's business contacts to apply for a training program in retailing at a major department store.

Ron's experience:

Before his injury, Ron had planned to enlist in the Air Force after high school graduation. He liked the idea of a career that would be physically demanding and adventurous and hoped to become a pilot. Now his physical disability clearly made that path impossible to pursue. The trouble he was having with learning and his lack of work experience made him doubt that he could be good at anything anymore. He felt unhappy and confused about his future.

Summary

All young people have to figure out what they want, gather and sort through information about jobs, gain experience, and develop their academic and interpersonal skills. It helps when they are encouraged and supported by their parents, family members, teachers and counselors. Young people who have been injured or have disabilities must do the same. A job or career should not be chosen because of an injury or disability, but by the person's abilities, qualifications, and experience.

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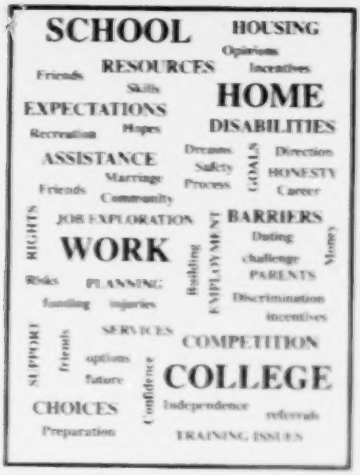
Job Exploration and Planning for the Future



Few people plan out their lives and careers as teenagers. Even fewer follow through on those plans. Most people find that the dreams of adolescence are tempered by life experience and knowing oneself better. Experiences in school and with jobs broaden understanding of the world of work. At the same time, personal skills, abilities and interests become clearer.

Students who experience traumatic injuries often find this process disrupted. At the very least, the timetable is delayed. How does the student with a traumatic injury gain the life and work experience necessary to move into adulthood? The answer is: through education. For youth with disabilities under the age of 22, the local school district has the responsibility of providing education, training and support services that will prepare the student for the next phase of life.

The student-parent-school partnership

An educational planning process for the student whose disabilities affect learning is required by state and federal laws. The minimum standards are set by federal laws. Some states exceed these standards and require additional services for students with disabilities. It is vital for parents to be aware of the laws and regulations in their state to insure that their child gets needed services. The federal law establishing special education services is called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). It includes a special category for students with traumatic brain injuries to help schools identify and respond to their special needs.

The process of planning, educating and training is based upon the idea of a student-parent-school partnership. Planning where and how the student will live and work after age 21 when school services are no longer

available is a process that begins at the first meeting with school staff to develop an educational plan. The name of these plans vary among states, but they are generally known as an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). This is the term used in this book.

Part of the IEP for a student who is a teenager must focus on preparing for life after high school. This part of the IEP is called a transition plan. IDEA requires that schools identify the transition needs of students who are receiving special education by age 14. A plan to prepare the student for adulthood and life after leaving school must be developed for the student by age 16.

The transition plan must include a statement of needed services that are based on a coordinated plan to guide and prepare the student for the future. The law specifies that transition planning must be an "outcome-oriented process." This means that the educational goals and program in the student's IEP will:

- define what the student will be able to do as a result;
- focus on activities that the student will need in order to live and work in the community; and
- be based on the goals and choices of the student.

Possible transition goals for high school students include:

- post-secondary education, such as college or trade school
- vocational training or preparation for employment
- supported employment which provides special assistance to workers with disabilities
- competitive employment which is paid employment on the same basis as persons without disabilities
- continuing/adult education
- referrals and linkages with adult services such as social services and vocational rehabilitation services
- independent living programs that help people with severe disabilities live independently in apartments or homes
- community participation in activities based on student's interests.

There are many ways that students can reach these goals, but it is most important that the steps be coordinated. Formal instruction, community experiences as volunteers, paid work, training in daily living skills and evaluations for vocational skills are just some of the methods that students use to gain experience and become prepared for the future.

Once the student graduates and leaves the special education system, it can be difficult and time consuming to become eligible for adult services. Therefore, it is very important that the student's transition plan in

the IEP include referrals to and agreements with adult service agencies so that long delays and gaps in services can be avoided.

The goal of transition planning is to help the student move toward the most productive and fulfilling life possible. This includes working in a productive job (paid or unpaid) and being an active part of the community. It also includes having a place to live, being able to get around and enjoying leisure time and recreational activities. The purpose of transition planning is to help the student shape and control her/his future. At every stage, the student's interests and desires must be considered.

The student and parents must take an active role in the job exploration and planning process.

All of the partners in the process work steadily through the student's plan and program. A "let's wait and see how the student does back at school" approach following hospitalization or an extended recovery at home may lead to problems. If the school staff or other members of the student's educational team have questions, then a clear set of steps can be outlined to get the information needed to put a complete educational plan into action.

What a student says:

"All through the hospital and rehab I was overwhelmed and felt pushed. The doctors and therapists were always scheduling me for stuff, and I couldn't wait to get home and go back to school. But, after a few months back at school, I felt kind of lost and forgotten. Everybody thought that, once I could get to all my classes, things would be OK. But that's not enough. All my friends are talking about what they are going to do when they graduate, but I can't do any of those things!"

What a parent says:

"The teacher and the counselor told us that they would take care of things, so our son could get his education. They said that there would be a meeting and we would be able to approve the plan they put together. But, we haven't heard anything. It's been almost three months since he went back to school."

What a teacher says:

"The process of putting an IEP together takes a lot of time, and parents who haven't been through it before don't understand how much has to go into the planning process."

One of the first steps in developing an IEP is doing an "assessment." This means identifying the student's strengths, hopes and dreams for the future and anticipating the problems that might come up along the way.

CAUTION

Both the parent and student should be involved in every step of putting the IEP together. This has to be a team effort (STUDENT-PARENT-SCHOOL) to be successful.

WHAT TO DO

TIP Tell the school staff that you want to attend all the assessment and planning meetings of the school team.

TIP Ask for and get an outline and timetable for the assessment and planning process from the school staff.

TIP Have the planning process explained.

TIP Ask school staff to prepare the student to participate in the planning, including how to communicate in the meetings and how to share needs and hopes.

TIP Keep the meetings and plan focused on what the student CAN DO, not only on what cannot be done.

Tom's experience:

Tom had been injured in the spring and continued his recovery over the summer. By the time school began in the fall, he was walking better, more able to control his right hand to eat and write, and was able to focus his attention longer. However, Tom continued to have major problems with his memory and attention. Getting along with his peers was becoming more difficult. His behavior confused many of his friends.

It was clear to Tom's parents that their previous hopes for Tom might not be realistic anymore. He might not be able to go to college. He wasn't the popular kid in school that he used to be. He didn't seem to fit in anywhere — at home, in school, with his friends. What would become of him? Would he be dependent on them for the rest of his life? What would happen to Tom after they were gone?

Tom's parents went to a conference for parents of children with special needs. They learned about the changes in the special education law called IDEA. They heard about a new type of "transition plan" for teenagers with disabilities and thought it might apply to Tom.

Tom's parents felt that if they could find some hope for his future, then they could manage to get through the problems that seemed so overwhelming today. They contacted the special education director and made a formal request to begin a transition plan for Tom.

The process of developing and implementing an IEP is largely regulated by federal and state governments and local school district policies. These regulations and policies are intended to make sure that the process is fair and nothing important is forgotten. Much of the planning has to be put into written forms. But, the paperwork requirements should never be allowed to get in the way of building an effective plan.

There are five basic steps in the planning process:

- Assessment...
  defining the student's strengths, needs and interests
- Looking at future possibilities...
  projecting where the student will be in 3 to 5 years
- Developing the plan...
  listing specific steps to accomplish long and short term goals
- Going ahead with the plan...
  putting those steps in action
- Evaluating the plan...
  reviewing it every few months and making adjustments

The School Plan (IEP) is the blueprint for building a bridge for the student from the teen years into adulthood.

What a student says:

"I know that I want to be on my own and live my own life. I know that I can't do some of the things I wanted to before I got hurt, but I can do something."

What a parent says:

"I am really worried. Before her injury I thought that she would go to trade school or community college, find work that interested her, and eventually get married and start a family. That seems impossible now. I want her to do what she can, but there's no way she could live on her own. And what will happen to her when I'm not able to care for her? Who will take over when I'm gone?"

What a teacher says:

"I'm not sure it's the job of the school to be planning the adult life of its students. I know that it needs to happen for kids with disabilities, but I'm not sure we are prepared for this."

CAUTION

Don't neglect looking at the future. In the past, most IEPs were written with the focus on what's going to happen during the school

year. **For teens moving into adulthood, not paying attention to hopes and dreams about the future can lead to dependence and disappointment.**

WHAT TO DO

TIP At the first IEP meeting, the parent and student should talk about the student's strengths and weaknesses and what is needed to meet the student's goals. The school team will define what assessment tools they must have to meet regulations.

TIP Make sure that the assessment includes the following:

- current and past academic skills/achievements
- communication skills
- social skills
- recreation and leisure activities and skills
- emotional strengths and responses
- knowledge of the world of work
- previous work experience
- previous social and community experience

TIP Make sure the above information is gathered from:

- the student
- the parent(s)
- former teachers
- hospital or rehabilitation personnel
- peers
- educational team member

TIP Make sure the following issues are explored for the future:

- job/career goals
- living/housing arrangements
- finances
- transportation
- social relationships
- recreation and leisure
- community involvement
- medical and safety issues.

Tom's experience:

At the first session to develop the transition plan, Tom, his parents and the school team focused on what Tom enjoyed, how he spent his time, and what he did well in school. The special education coordinator wrote:

- Tom enjoys sports - he still likes to play baseball and basketball.
- Tom had a paper route before his injury and was well liked by his customers.
- Tom enjoys going to movies and watching videos -- he has a large collection.
- Tom was an average student before his injury with good grades in science and social studies.
- Tom has improved in reading, but math continues to be hard.
- Tom's writing is improving since he has been using the computer.
- Tom did very well working in Industrial Arts class this year.

Then the whole team, including Tom and his parents, listed the following long range goals:

- Basic skills to function in society. (teacher)
- A good job and ability to earn enough to support himself after we're out of the picture. (father)
- Doing work that I would like and have fun at.(Tom)
- Support, guidance, and "a safety net" when he's on his own. (school counselor)
- Friends and people who care about him. (mother)

At the conclusion of the first planning session, the school staff shared some academic, vocational, and training ideas that could be considered for Tom during the next four or five years. They discussed:

- volunteer opportunities in school and the community
- a job exploration program for students with developmental disabilities
- job shadowing - finding people doing jobs Tom might be interested in and letting Tom spend time with them on the job learning what it's really like
- placement in "internships" where the student gets experience and training
- job placement in a part-time or full-time job for full pay

The individual education plan brings together the hopes and dreams of the student and parent with the knowledge and skill of the educators to build a long range plan.

What a student says:

"I think I would like to work in an office with computers, but I'm not sure. It's kind of scary, because I'm not sure of all the stuff you have to do."

What a parent says:

"I'm afraid that the teachers think that my son can't work because of his disability."

What a teacher says:

"Students and parents often deny the severity of the disability and think that the student can do more than he ever will be able."

CAUTION

This sorting out process is not easy. All team members have ideas and experiences that may conflict with others. Everyone must respect each other's opinions.

WHAT TO DO

TIP The long range plan should include student's goals including:

- what the student will do each day
- where the student will live three to five years after leaving school
- what resources the student will need
- what support and assistance can be given by adult service agencies

TIP Build a calendar of each year's goals, activities and resources.

TIP The plan must identify the concerns of each team member and the methods that will be used to avoid problems.

TIP The annual plan says what will happen this year in order to fulfill the long range plan. The annual plan includes:

- specific steps (objectives) to be carried out this year
- who will be responsible for each step
- ways to define the student's progress with each objective
- when progress on each step will be reviewed

CAUTION

Each team member should ask how each step will lead to the student achieving the long range goal.

Tom's experience:

Tom and his parents left the planning session agreeing to visit the job

exploration program and to think of contacts they had. The school staff agreed to write up a preliminary draft of a long range plan and the short range goals for review at the next meeting.

At the next meeting of the team, Tom's parents reported that they had visited the job exploration program and that Tom did not like it. As the discussion continued, it was clear that neither Tom nor his parents liked the idea of Tom entering a program that was designed for students with mental retardation and developmental disabilities. They did, however, present a number of ideas about volunteer and job shadowing opportunities:

- Tom's uncle is a police officer and would be willing to help with a job shadowing arrangement in the police dispatcher's office.
- A neighbor has a small farm and is willing to have Tom work part-time.
- Tom spoke with the librarian at school about being a media aide.

Despite being disappointed at Tom's and his parent's response to the job exploration program, the school staff members pressed ahead with the ideas shared. A long range plan was developed and everyone agreed to the IEP after some adjustments.

Learning about working and different jobs is a major part of any plan for a student who has a disability.

Both a long range plan and the annual IEP should contain the steps to be taken for job exploration and experience.

What a student says:

"I thought I would like working in an office, but it was too much for me. I got real confused with so many people rushing around and so much noise. Then I got a job working in the greenhouse that I liked a lot better, especially because I was outside sometimes and I worked with nature."

What a parent says:

"We didn't think that our son would ever be able to work because the first two jobs turned out to be disasters. Then the school was able to get him a job working in data entry on a computer. He can work at his own pace. He may be slow, but he's accurate. He really likes the people in the office."

What a teacher says:

"Our transitional training program works, because we give students multiple on-the-job experiences. Pre-vocational training that

is limited to the classroom can only go so far. Students often find it hard to take what they learned in the classroom and apply it to real work situations."

CAUTION

Most people try out a number of different jobs before settling on a field of work and a particular job. Therefore, it is critical that the student have opportunities to try out three or more job experiences before leaving school.

WHAT TO DO

TIP Build on the ideas and contacts of each team member: parents, teachers, agency representatives and the student. Finding opportunities is a highly personalized process. Who do you know that might be willing to help?

TIP Don't expect that every job experience will be a success. Expect that more than half of all the placements will not meet someone's hopes — the student's, the parent's, the employer's, or the school staff's. However, find and identify the things that were learned from the experience! Use that experience to revise the plan and direction.

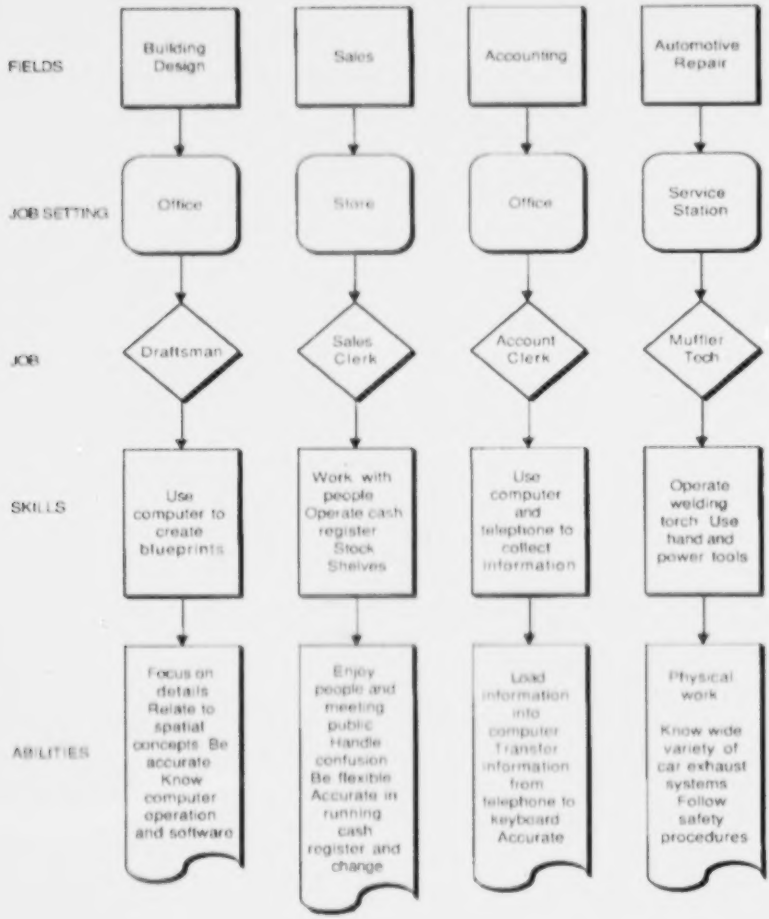
TIP Help each member of the team (student, parents, staff, and others) to think about jobs and careers in an organized way. Look at each aspect of a given job and compare it to the student's strengths, interests and preferences.

TIP Build the job/career exploration efforts in a way that the student can define his strengths, interests and preferences more clearly. Match those to the overall field of interest, preferred job setting, actual job, the job skills required and the abilities or talents needed.

Tom's experience:

Over the next two years, Tom's plan was carried out. Some parts were great successes, and others were not. Tom's experience working at the neighbor's farm was a disaster. He was afraid of the animals, and both Tom and the farmer agreed to end the job after a week. On the other hand, the experience of being a media aide was very positive. The librarian found Tom to be very reliable and adept. Tom especially enjoyed figuring out how to solve problems with the video and TV equipment. The job

Ways of thinking about jobs and careers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Operate welding torch Use hand and power tools
ABILITIES
Focus on details Relate to spatial concepts Be accurate Know computer operation and software
Enjoy people and meeting public Handle confusion Be flexible Accurate in running cash register and change
Load information into computer Transfer information from telephone to keyboard Accurate
Physical work
Know wide variety of car exhaust systems Follow safety procedures

shadowing experience at the police station was helpful, too. Tom was especially interested in the radio, phone and computer systems, but he found it stressful to be in a place with constant calls coming in and out.

The school staff, the parents and even Tom began to see some of his strengths and interests point in a direction. Over the next two years, Tom worked first as an intern at a photo processing lab and then in a part-time job at the local cable TV channel studio where he operated video editing equipment. Tom's speed was slower than other workers, but in both jobs his supervisors felt that his accuracy, follow-through, and friendly per-

sonality offset the slowness of his work. They encouraged Tom to consider work in the field.

Tom, his parents and the school staff are now looking into technical training beyond high school in video editing.

The goal of the individual education plan is to build a positive, step by step map of the future.

What a parent says:
"How do I know when a plan is good one? I've never done this before."

What a student says:
"What if I still can't get a job after we do all this work?"

What a teacher says:
"We have to satisfy the reporting requirements for the special education law."

WHAT TO DO

TIP Students, parents, and teachers can evaluate the plan by asking the following:

Check if the plan gives the student:

- more self-confidence and direction?
- more responsibility for making choices about his/her future?
- allow for the risk of failing but give support when needed?
- real knowledge of many different types of jobs?
- choice of a job goal based upon experience?
- experience in at least three different jobs before leaving school?
- real skills for a job?
- social and recreational experiences?
- skills to speak for oneself to the greatest degree possible?
- access to another person who can act as an advocate/case co-ordinator when needed?
- enough income for adequate housing, nutrition and health care?
- time for meaningful work, balanced with time for recreation?
- the opportunity to learn and work as much as possible with nondisabled peers?

These are the qualities of an effective plan.

3

Getting a Job... Barriers for People with Disabilities

Applicants often fear that if they have special needs, they won't be hired. Employers may consider hiring a person with a disability, but are cautious if they haven't done it before. Many employers find it easier simply not to hire a person with a disability, even when that person is the most qualified. Although this is against the law, it is hard to prove.

There are usually many applicants for any job and only the employer has the information to compare their qualifications. Despite the fact that there are federal and state laws to protect people with disabilities, discrimination still happens. There are many ways that prejudice, ignorance and inexperience affect an employer's decisions about hiring and firing people with disabilities.

Frank comments by employers about hiring people with disabilities:

- "Some disabled people confuse sympathy with efficiency. I might feel sorry for someone or want to help, but I have a business to run. If the person can't do the work, then I won't hire him."
- "I'm looking for people who can do the job, do it well and do it right. My workers need to be on time and here on the days and hours that I need them. As long as they can do that, whether they're disabled or not makes no difference to me."
- "I can make changes so that a person with a disability can do the job, but I can't pay good money for less work or poor work."
- "If I hire someone who's disabled and it turns out that he can't do the job, I'll never be able to get rid of him without being sued. I can't afford to take that chance."
- "I'm not a human service agency. I'm a businessman. Counselors call me and they give me the person's life story. I don't care

how nice the person is or what terrible thing happened. I want to know, "Does this person have the skills and experience that I need for the job?"

The process of finding a job is not easy for anyone. The term "competitive employment" means that people with disabilities are competing for the same jobs as people who are not disabled. It means the standards for the quality and rate of work are the same, and so is the pay. This does not mean that the disability is ignored. The job is not changed, but how the worker does the job may be changed because of the disability. This is best shown by an example.

A secretarial job is advertised. The main requirement is the ability to type 60 words per minute accurately. All applicants must take a typing test. In a competitive job, anyone applying must meet this requirement.

- Gary has a disability that affects his right hand. He types 35 words per minute and fails the typing test.
- Karen uses a wheelchair. She passes the typing test at 85 words per minute.
- There are 5 other applicants who pass the typing test. None have a disability. They type between 62 and 76 words per minute.

Gary is not qualified. The employer is justified in not hiring him, because he can not meet the standard for competitive employment. However, Gary is upset and believes that he was not hired because he has a disability. In high school, teachers gave him extra time during tests, because he wrote very slowly. He expects that employers will do the same.

Karen has the best typing test score as well as experience from part-time jobs. She is the most qualified applicant. But, during the typing test, the employer notices that her wheelchair does not fit beneath the desk. They discuss ways of raising the desk or getting a different one, so that Karen's work surface will be at a proper height for her. Such a change is known as an "accommodation."

Accommodations

Applicants with disabilities have the right to ask for and receive accommodations and most are not very costly. However, they are sometimes reluctant to ask for them, sensing that employers are already nervous about hiring someone with a disability. Clear, open communication between applicants with disabilities and employers is the key to minimizing potential problems, as shown by the following examples.

Active strategy

Karen suggests that placing bricks or wooden blocks under each desk leg would raise the desk to a comfortable height. Karen explains that this is how her desk was modified in her high school typing class. The employer is relieved, because he didn't know what was expected of him under the law if he hired her. No one using a wheelchair has ever worked for his company before. He doesn't want to buy an expensive desk that no one else will ever be able to use.

Passive strategy

Karen doesn't say anything about the desk, because she doesn't want the employer to think that she needs special treatment. The employer is worried that if he hires Karen, he will have to buy a new desk. He can see that the old one is too low for her wheelchair. He can't afford this expense, so he doesn't offer her the job. He knows that she can't find out how the other applicants scored on their typing tests, because they all applied on different days. He'll just let her think that someone else was more qualified.

Talking about your disability

Interviewers and vocational counselors frequently use the term "disability disclosure." It basically means providing information about a disability to an employer. When and how it is best to do this is the difficult question. Do you mention it in a letter, phone call or resume? Do you talk about it during an interview? People have mixed opinions about this. A fuller discussion of if, when and how to talk about your disability is presented in Chapter 5.

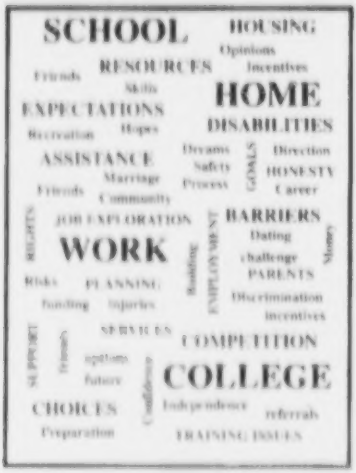
Comments about disclosure by people with disabilities.

- "If he knows I have a disability, I'll never even get an interview."
- "I don't tell them ahead of time. I just show up. That way they have to talk to me."
- "As long as I don't say anything, they'll never know about it."

Whether or not a disability is visible affects an employer's first impression of the applicant. A person who uses a wheelchair, cane or crutches can not hide the disability. Other conditions are less visible. Despite appearing physically fit, individuals may have conditions that cause fatigue, blurred vision, difficulty with memory, changes in behavior or chronic pain. A disability is, however, only part of a larger first impression that includes dress, neatness, cleanliness, speech, gestures, and eye contact.

4

Your Employment Rights



Many employers are uncomfortable and inexperienced in interviewing people with disabilities. Interviewers may make quick judgments about the abilities and limits of an applicant with a disability. Some assume that all severely disabled teenagers or young adults have been disabled since birth. Others assume that a physical disability means a mental disability as well. Some employers think that people with disabilities are injured more easily or sick more often.

People with disabilities are protected against discrimination in employment by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This federal law covers the employment practices of private businesses and state and local governments that employ 15 or more people. Employees of the United States government are covered by Section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. In addition, some states have their own antidiscrimination laws.

The ADA states that a covered employer cannot refuse to hire you, cannot pay you less, cannot fire you, and cannot deny you a promotion or any other benefit of employment *simply because you have a disability*. If you are able to do a particular job that you are applying for or have been hired for, this law protects you from being treated differently from anyone else.

The ADA uses certain key terms that are important to understand. It protects a *"qualified individual with a disability."* This means someone who can perform the *"essential functions"* of a job, whether or not the person needs a *"reasonable accommodation"* to do so. *"Essential functions"* are the fundamental job duties. They are part of the written job description and require major time on the job. For instance, operating a copy machine might be an essential function for an office clerk, but cleaning and repairing it is done by a service person.

"A reasonable accommodation" is a change that an employer makes so that a person with a disability has the same opportunity as anyone else to apply and test for a job, to do the job and receive the same benefits.

Examples include building ramps and widening doorways for people using wheelchairs, providing interpreters for people with hearing disorders, and making training materials available in Braille for persons who are blind. Accommodations must always be considered on an individual basis.

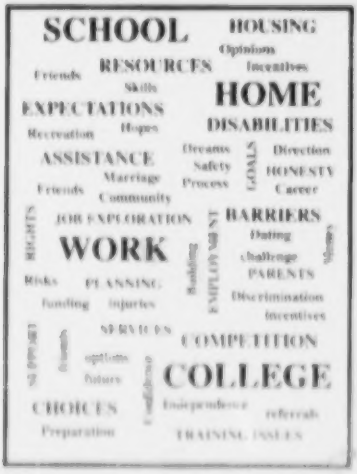
An employer is required by the ADA to make reasonable accommodations to meet the needs of a qualified applicant or employee who is disabled, unless it results in an *"undue hardship"* for the employer. An accommodation can be considered an *"undue hardship"* if it is very expensive or very difficult for the employer. The size and financial resources of the employer's business are considered. An undue hardship for a small company might not be for a large corporation. The law allows an employee who is disabled to find and use other sources of funding for accommodations. This can also help the employer by lessening the cost.

An employer is only required to make accommodations when it is known that an applicant or employee has a disability. This means that the person who is disabled is responsible for making what is needed clear. The employer is not allowed to ask if you have a disability, but may ask if and how you will be able to perform the functions of the job. For instance, if you are applying for a job as a mail carrier, the postmaster can ask you to show how you will be able to lift a heavy sack of mail several times a day, but cannot ask if you have a back injury.

If a person believes that the ADA has been violated, then a complaint can be filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which is a federal enforcement agency. The EEOC will investigate the complaint and determine if there has been any discrimination because of the disability.

5

Guide to Competitive Employment



Looking for and finding a job is the same whether or not you have a disability. However, it can be tough to compete for a job with people who are not disabled. This is especially true in a tight economy when jobs are scarce. There are many reasons for not being hired. It is easy to blame the disability or accuse the employer of being prejudiced.

The following guide was designed for all job applicants, but it has special suggestions for people with disabilities.

Make a good impression

There is truth to the old saying, "You don't get a second chance to create a first impression." The first contact with an employer is very important, whether it is by telephone, on paper or in person.

Telephone calls

Be organized ahead of time. Know why you are calling, what you want to ask, and be prepared to write down information or answer questions. Get the names of the people you spoke with and thank them for their time.

Suggestions: If you have trouble hearing or speaking over the telephone, then think about whether this is the best way to make your first contact with an employer. If your speech is hard to understand, consider making the first contact by letter to be sure of being understood. Another option is to have someone speak for you. However, this needs to be planned carefully as it can easily backfire. If a parent, friend, counselor, or teacher calls for you, it is important that the person explain why. Other-

wise, the employer may feel that you are trying to hide your disability or are being dishonest. It can also give the impression that you can't think or speak for yourself and may lead the employer to believe you need lots of help.

Susan's experience:

Susan's speech was slow and slurred, but understandable. She was applying for a bookkeeping job in a small company. She decided to make her first contact by letter, and the company mailed her an application. She filled it out, making sure that it was neat and complete. She attached samples of her bookkeeping assignments from high school. The company wrote back with a date for an interview and asked that she call to confirm it.

Susan worried that they would cancel the appointment when they heard her speak, since it would be obvious that she had a disability. She asked her parents to call for her, but they refused. Instead, they practiced the telephone conversation with Susan by pretending to be the employer. Susan found that she became less nervous the more she rehearsed her phone call. This helped her concentrate on speaking as clearly as possible. She was relieved when the employer understood her easily and wanted to meet her.

Sometimes young adults don't have the confidence to talk with employers on the telephone. They ask their parents to call for them or hand them the phone midway through a conversation. This may raise questions in the employer's mind about maturity and independence.

Bill's experience:

Bill, a nineteen year old, recent high school graduate was looking for a job in an auto parts store. He called to answer an ad for a supply clerk. The employer was scheduling an interview, but he became skeptical when Tom called his mother to the phone to set up the appointment and get directions. The employer later called back and said, "Sorry, the job's been filled." Although this wasn't true, he reasoned that, "If the kid wasn't smart enough to figure out how to get here, then I don't want him working for me."

Letters

You also make a first impression by letter. Grammar, spelling and neatness are important. Many job ads say "no phone calls." A business letter is your introduction to an employer. Below is a standard outline and an example.

Standard outline/format

Date

Name
Street address
city, state, zip

Person you are writing
Title
company name
street address
city, state, zip

Dear

Introduction
- why you are writing
- what job you're applying for

Body
- refer to attached pieces (enclosed is my resume)
- give details on your education and experience

Closing
- what action you expect from reader
- describe your next plan of action
- thank the reader

Sincerely,

Your name and signature

Sample of a business letter

March 16, 1996

Your Name
9 Marshall St.
West Carlisle, NY 83790

John Itaglio
Director of Personnel
White's Department Store
94 Main St.
Brownstone, NY 83726

Dear Mr. Itaglio:

I am writing to apply for the job of cashier that was advertised in the newspaper, the Daily Gazette, on March 13th.

My resume is included and describes my education and experience. I have just graduated from Brinkley High School where my special interests were math and business. My work experience includes jobs as cashier at a restaurant, stock person in a supermarket, and a newspaper delivery person. I am a reliable worker and have references.

I hope you will call me, if my experience interests you. I can be reached at my home phone at 847-3768. You may mail me any application information at this address.

I will call your office in a few days to ask if you need any more information. I hope to meet you soon.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Bob Barkley

Many students ask if letters need to be typed. It depends partly on the kind of job you are looking for, how neatly you write, and if you have a typewriter or computer. Many people ask friends or relatives to type letters for them. Typed letters are easy to read and make a good impression. The appearance and content of the letter are both important. A letter is a reflection of you. If it is sloppy, poorly spelled, on dirty, wrinkled or torn paper and hard to read, it makes a bad impression. If it doesn't give enough information, it may be thrown out. If it is too long, it may not be read. It helps to write several practice letters and ask a family member, counselor, or teacher to read them and make suggestions before mailing the final letter.

Resumes

Many employers expect applicants to submit resumes and complete written job application forms. A resume is a summary of your background, experience, skills and talents. Its purpose is to get you a job interview. Many young adults, just out of high school or college, think that they don't need a resume, because they haven't worked full-time before or don't have much experience. Resumes are still useful, because they give an employer a quick overview of your background and serve as a guide during an interview. A good resume can help you get an interview, and it will help the employer during the interview.

When an employer doesn't have a resume or completed application, the interviewer has to take notes and remember more information. This is risky for the applicant, because the interviewer's notes or memory may not be accurate. Notes can get lost and the interviewer then has no written record of your experience and skills. The easier you make it for the interviewer to remember you favorably, the better your chances of getting the job.

Dates of schooling and work history are among the first things employers look at in a resume. Gaps create questions for employers and are often signals that something is different. Information about a disability is not usually included in a resume.

An employer can pick up clues from a resume that the person has a disability. For example, a special school or program may include "disabled" in its name. Therefore, it is important to note any special awards, honor roll or high grades in special education programs. Rather than placing a label that you are "different," they show evidence of success and ability.

Many injuries result in missed school due to hospitalization and rehabilitation. Changes in abilities and interests after an injury may require more schooling or training. Adolescents injured during high school may graduate later than their peers.

The employer may simply look at extra years in high school and assume that you're not too bright, didn't care, or got into trouble. A resume can show an employer that you worked hard to overcome difficulties by putting in additional time at school or getting special training. This shows effort, commitment; and perseverance. These are qualities that employers look for. Special achievements, such as awards or honors, show that you have skills and abilities to offset any limits from an injury.

The following is an outline and a sample resume for a 19 year old high school graduate with some job experience.

FORMAT

Your name
street address
city, state, zip code
(area code) phone number

Job objective:
Describe what kind of job are you looking for in 1-2 lines.

Education:
Start with name and address of high school, years attended and date of graduation. If you did not graduate, list last grade completed. If you have a G.E.D. (graduate equivalent diploma), give date received. List adult education courses taken or special training programs.

Experience:
List all jobs you have held, including part-time jobs during school, summer jobs and volunteer work. Give brief description of your positions and responsibilities.

Extra curricular activities and awards:
List offices you've been elected to as well as societies, clubs, honor society, etc. These show talents and skills outside the classroom.

Interests and hobbies:
These are helpful for young applicants with little experience, because they indicate your talents and interests. They may be transferable to some jobs. For example, a person who paints or draws shows talent that may interest a company that does graphic design or photography. Someone who does carpentry in spare time may be familiar with tools and building supplies; knowledge that is useful for work in a hardware store or construction company.

References:

These are usually not listed on the resume but are given upon request. It is important to ask permission before giving a person's name, address and phone number. Employers must ask your permission to contact them. This gives you a chance to let your references know that they can expect a call or letter, and you can prepare them by describing the job you have applied for.

Sample

Kathleen Gold
86 Stockton St., Apt. 84
Boston, MA 02114
617-847-3628

Job objective: Data entry operator in medium size company.

Education:

1992	Branderson State College, West Campus, Branderson, MA courses in English composition and algebra
1991	Bridgton Center for Adult Education, Computer Training Division, Bridgton, MA 12 week IBM computer training in Word Perfect 5.1, Lotus 1-2-3 and D-base.
1988-92	Emerson High School, Boston, MA - graduated June

Experience:

1991	Data entry clerk, KVS Corp., Dorchester, MA (June-Aug).
1987-88	Part-time switchboard operator, 10 hours per week. Data Plus Corp., Boston, MA
1986	Volunteer at City General Hospital.

Extra curricular activities and awards:

Reporter, high school newspaper
Member, Student Computer Club, Emerson High

Interests: computer games, science fiction

The Job Interview

Most people get nervous about job interviews. They see them as their only chance to get the job. The interview is a critical factor in the employer's decision about hiring. Asking you to come in for an interview is a sign that the employer has already found something of interest in your application, resume, cover letter, or phone call. The interview is the next step for the employer to consider you for a job.

An interview is basically a conversation with a purpose. It is the employer's way to get information on your interests, abilities, skills and accomplishments. An interview is a two-way street. The employer has the chance to learn more about you, and you have the chance to learn more about the company.

Interview Preparation

The most common reason for doing poorly on a interview is lack of preparation. Here are some ways to prepare.

Step 1: Size up an employer

In addition to its product or service, each company or business has a personality and style. This applies whether it is a local business in your neighborhood or a large company. The personality of a company will influence your decision about whether or not you would like to work there, if you are offered a job. Below is a list of key questions to ask.

- How large is the company or business? How many employees are there?
- How long has it been in business?
- Does it operate year-round, or is it a seasonal business? If it is seasonal, what happens to employees during the off seasons?
- What products does it make or sell? Or, what services does it provide?
- Who are its customers?
- How are workers supervised?
- What are the company's future plans or long-range goals?
- Does the company have different locations and do you have a choice where you can work?

How do you find out this information? Most large companies have printed materials and brochures that describe their history, organization, products and financial status. These are called Annual Reports. You can ask for one by calling the company's personnel office or Department of Human Resources. If they do not have an annual report, then you can ask

for any written information or brochures on the company. By doing your homework before the interview, you show the employer that you are seriously interested. Most interviewers talk about the company many times in one day. By learning as much as you can in advance, you use the time in the interview more effectively to talk about the specific job and your qualifications.

Two questions that require additional probing are:

- Does the company have a good "character?"
- Does it have a good reputation?

An interviewer will always give you positive answers to these questions as his job is to represent the company positively. More direct information is available through informal sources. In small communities, friends, neighbors and relatives usually know people who are current or past employees. Even if you cannot find people who have worked for the company, others in a similar line of business may be familiar with it and able to provide information. Local newspapers often carry stories about local businesses that are stored in their files. Many local libraries have business directories and computerized information. The local Chamber of Commerce is another excellent source of information on businesses in its area and has a list of members. With a little effort, much can be learned.

Step 2: Evaluate yourself

Many young adults look for entry level jobs after leaving high school or college without a clear plan for the future. They more or less figure it out as they go along by trying out different jobs and comparing experiences and salaries with their friends. As the job market becomes tighter, new graduates find it more difficult to get that first job and harder to move between jobs. Many who can afford it are going on to college or continuing in graduate programs and hoping that employment will be easier to find when they have finished school.

It will probably be harder for the young person with a disability to get that first job and to move between jobs. Many persons with disabilities have been successful in school, but have not been able to translate their skills into employment. Many have entered and continued with vocational training programs without a clear goal at the end. Many have gone on to additional training programs when a job couldn't be found. But, more schooling and training does not guarantee a job for anyone.

Direction

Have you defined your basic personal needs?

- Where and how you will live?

Whether you choose to live with family, friends or alone is a personal choice but it may be influenced by your needs. Think about if you

need help with physical care such as bathing, dressing and toileting or with handling chores such as shopping, meal preparation and housecleaning. Think about whether or not your home will need special modifications such as ramps, widened doorways or visual fire alarms.

- What kind of transportation do you have?

If your condition affects your ability to drive, use the bus or subway, or walk, then find out if other transportation is available for getting to work. Are there accessible taxis or paratransit systems for people with disabilities? If so, are they reliable enough for you to count on them for getting to work on time? Some people don't mind commuting long distances, while others do. Think about how much time and energy you can spend traveling without it interfering with your ability to do your job.

- How much money do you need for basic living costs?

Basic living costs include housing, food, clothing and medical expenses. How much money you need depends on whether or not you have to pay all these costs yourself. As a person with a disability, you might be eligible for subsidized housing, in which the government pays part of your rent. You might qualify for food stamps or cash assistance programs such as SSI and Social Security or for health insurance through Medicaid or Medicare.

Goal achievement

Do you have specific goals for yourself?

- Have your goals changed since your injury? How and why?
- How hard and long are you willing to work to reach those goals?
- How do you define success for yourself and your work?

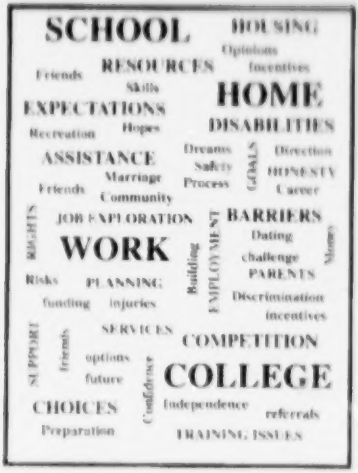
Many adolescents and young adults rethink their career goals after they are injured. Some hadn't really given their futures much thought before. Some hadn't really been too interested in school. For others, the loss of career goal was a painful disappointment.

"Our son was a really great hockey player. Even as a young kid, his natural talent was obvious. He hoped to try out for a pro team after high school. But after he got hurt in the car accident, he couldn't play on the team anymore. He had to give up his dream."

The impact of an injury varies greatly. While some students have to give up plans for college, others become interested in college for the first time. Some students lower their expectations, while others overcome changes and limits caused by their injuries.

6

Vocational Skills



Do you have the education and skills needed for the job you are applying for?

Communication

How do you organize your thoughts and ideas?

Many persons who have had brain injuries have difficulty organizing their ideas and activities. Notebooks with written lists of things to do, questions to ask, dates of appointments, and reminders are helpful. Strategies that helped you get organized at school may be useful in a work setting as well.

How do you express yourself when speaking or writing?

If you have any difficulty with your speech, it is important to have strategies to help yourself be understood. Let people know that you do not mind them asking you to repeat yourself. Write down information, if it is difficult for others to understand your speech.

If your writing skills have been affected by your injury, then it is important to consider how much writing is required for a specific job. Computers have made it easier for many people with disabilities to work. However, if your injury has affected the use of your hands, arms or fingers, then your typing or data entry may be slower than that of other workers. Try to determine in advance how important speed and accuracy are to the employer. Many occupational therapists and rehabilitation clinics can evaluate if special devices can help increase your accuracy and typing rate.

Intelligence

Do you have the ability to:

- understand a job assignment?

- learn the details of the operation?

People with disabilities who look, speak or act differently in any way are often assumed to be less intelligent. Unfortunately, this happens often to people with brain injuries. Neuropsychological and vocational testing can help you match possible jobs with your abilities. This can be done while you are still in school.

Very often, brain injuries change how information is learned, processed and organized. Short-term or long-term memory may be affected. By knowing as much as possible about how you learn, you can better organize your work and use prompts or cues to help your memory. This information can help you avoid getting yourself into jobs that are so advanced they are frustrating, or so simple they are boring.

Energy level

Many people with injuries and disabilities need extra time for basic daily routines of personal care and for transportation. Many tire more readily than before their injury. When they return to work, they find that a full 8 hour day and 40 hour work week are too tiring physically or too stressful emotionally. Some have medical setbacks when they overdo activities. It is important to know your body's abilities and limits and to plan a work schedule that fits them.

If you need a shorter work day or work week, this can be discussed ahead of time with an employer. By ignoring your body's needs and limits, you risk setting back your rehabilitation and doing a poor job. An employer would much prefer a part-time reliable and productive worker than a full-time one who is so tired that work is poor and absences are frequent.

The Interview

Before your interview, think about if, when, why and how you want to discuss your disability with a potential employer. It is helpful to be prepared to talk about your disability if it affects how you will be able to do the job and if you will need accommodations. It is not appropriate to talk about your disability in order to gain sympathy or make excuses for yourself.

You do not have to answer an interviewer's questions if they have nothing to do with your aptitude for the job and are only based on curiosity about your disability. You can handle this by saying something like, "I would feel better talking about my qualifications and how I can do this job."

Positive reasons to talk about your condition

IF I talk about it...

I can say as little or as much as I choose.
I can make my abilities and limits clear.
I'll get it out in the open, and I won't be waiting for him to say something.

WHY I'll talk about it...

He may not know anyone else like me.
I'll feel more comfortable.

WHEN I'll talk about it...

I'll describe how it would affect my ability to do the job.
I'll make it clear how it affects me and how it doesn't.
I'll let him know if I'll need any special help during work hours.

HOW I'll talk about it...

I'll be clear but brief.
I'll use terms that are easily understood.
I'll bring examples of my work at school or from previous jobs to show what I can do.

How to discuss personal issues with an employer- bathroom needs

Employers can not ask personal questions that are not related to your ability to do the job and to work safely. For example, they can not ask how you get dressed or bathe, who fixes your meals or cleans the house. They can not ask if you live alone, with your family, or need hired help. They cannot ask if you are able to drive a car or need a special van, unless driving is required as part of the job.

However, employers can be concerned about if you can get to work on time and how you will handle your physical needs while you are at work. The need for any special arrangements for use of the bathroom while at work can be discussed, such as installation of grab bars, special seats, widened doors or other items. It is important to let the employer know in advance to estimate the costs and make changes.

Checking out the workplace bathroom can be done in the same straightforward way that you check out other architectural barriers such as stairs or doorways. The most direct way is to ask to see the bathroom. You can then let the employer know immediately if any changes are needed. Ignoring this critical function can place the employer and person with a

disability at risk. For example, the employer may worry about being sued if you fall while using the bathroom, and you may risk another injury.

Situations where the individual with a disability needs help with toileting can be complicated especially if lifting is needed. The ADA does not list personal care assistance as a reasonable accommodation. Employers cannot require coworkers to assist in such personal care, as this would place them at risk of injuries, and is not part of their job description. Usually only large companies have employee health departments with nurses available. Solving bathroom needs may call for some creative accommodations.

Mary's experience:

Mary had all the qualifications for the advertised position of receptionist in a human resources department. She almost didn't get the job, however, because she couldn't use the toilet without help. Although her wheelchair fit into the bathroom, she needed help getting in and out of her chair and with her clothing. The supervisor felt it was unreasonable to ask any coworkers to help her. Mary was especially frustrated, since the job was in a hospital where nurses gave this kind of help to patients all the time. However, the nursing supervisor refused to involve her staff in Mary's personal care.

One option Mary proposed was to work part-time. She knew she would be okay for at least four hours without using the bathroom. The employer needed a receptionist full time, however, and didn't want the extra trouble of having to hire two part-time employees.

Finally, arrangements were made to hire Mary and give her an extended lunch hour of 90 minutes, so she could return to her nearby home for her midday toileting needs. The inconvenience of extra travel time for Mary was offset by being able to use the bathroom in the privacy of her home with her mother's assistance. The employer's inconvenience of having the reception area uncovered for double the normal lunch time was offset by Mary's suggestion of working 45 minutes later each day. This gave the employer the unexpected benefit of extended phone coverage at the end of the work day. Lack of this coverage had been a frequent complaint in the past.

Questions interviewers ask

There are basic questions most interviewers ask. You can prepare for an interview by rehearsing your replies.

Tell me about yourself.

This is often the first question asked. Because it can't be answered by a "yes" or "no," it gives interviewers a chance to see how you handle a

conversation. It is a test of how you organize information and what you think is important for the interviewer to know about you. If you have filled in an application or sent a resume ahead, this is a chance to expand on it. This is also a point where you can decide if you want to refer to your disability.

For what position are you applying?

Vague answers are not helpful here. Replies like "anything that is available" show that you are not prepared. You need to know exactly what position interests you. If you do not know what the job is, then you can't tell if you are qualified. Interviewers see many people in a day. This question is usually asked so the interviewer and you are both clear on the job that is available.

What are your goals?

Many interviewers in corporations or large businesses will ask where you see yourself in 5 years. It helps them judge how serious you are about a career and how carefully you have thought out your future. From the employer's perspective, a company invests money in an employee. Companies plan for the future and look for employees whose long-term goals match theirs. Is this person worth the investment of the company's money? Interviewers also use this question to evaluate an applicant's initiative and sense of responsibility.

You may still be asked about goals even when applying for temporary or part-time work. Your response tells the employer a great deal about you. A reply of, "I don't know," doesn't say much about you. By contrast, the following responses give information about your current skills and future goals.

"I'm not sure yet, but I like working with figures and am good at detail. I've thought about a career in banking or accounting."

"I'm not sure yet. I like art and have done some painting. I'm thinking about a career in graphic design."

"I've always liked building things. I can't work as a carpenter because of my injury, but I'm thinking about going to college to study architecture."

"I like to cook. I think I'd like working in a restaurant, because I know a lot about food and its preparation."

What are your strengths and weaknesses?

This is one of the most commonly asked questions in an interview. Employers use it to assess an applicant's insight. It is useful to think about this question in advance and to prepare and rehearse your response with a counselor or family members. It is important to strike a balance.

Describing only your strengths and denying any weaknesses is not realistic — nobody's perfect. It also indicates to an employer that you may not respond well to criticism about your work or suggestions for improvements. On the other hand, focusing too much on your weaknesses may convince an employer not to hire you. Most successful applicants try to stress their abilities while also listing several areas where they feel they need to develop their skills. An employer will respond well to an applicant who has an awareness of limited qualifications or experience and an interest in improving them.

Again, this question gives you a choice about discussing your disability and any effects it has on your ability to do the job. It is very important to present limits in a positive way. For example,

"After I was injured, I stayed in high school an extra year, since I had missed a lot of school. I took special courses and training in computers. Then I went to a community college for an associate's degree in accounting. In addition to five courses in introductory and intermediate bookkeeping and accounting, I have computer skills in spreadsheet programs and data base management. I want to work in an office since my disability limits extensive walking, lifting and standing."

Give me an example of your ability.

Employers try to find ways to see proof of your skills. Any evidence of your ability that is related to the job is useful. Written examples such as term papers, grades, sketches or letters of support can be presented during the interview and inserted in your file with the employer. You can also describe your abilities with examples based on your experience. This can be done when applying for a job at any level. Employers look for examples that show your ability to work effectively and reliably. Such evidence can help overcome any concerns an employer has about your disability.

Why do you want to work for us?

The more specific you can be, the better. If you can't answer this question, the employer has no reason to hire you. Again, prepare and rehearse your answer in advance. This question is a chance to show that you have done your homework on the company and that your skills match their needs.

Jeff's experience:

"I have always been interested in cars. Although my condition prevents me from working as a mechanic, I believe my knowledge would be useful in a stockroom or billing department. I know a lot about the operation and repair of cars, since I took an auto mechanics program in voca-

tional school. Your company is listed by the better business bureau as having a lower than average number of complaints. My family has also bought its last 3 cars from you and has been very pleased by the service."

What did you learn from your part-time work or summer job?

Adolescents or young adults often find this question a problem, if recent injuries limited chances to work after school or during the summer. It is usually best to be direct. If you worked before you were hurt, then mention it and explain gaps in your employment. This is where volunteer work, special interest clubs, or student activities can be discussed to balance limited work experience.

Many employers are skeptical about hiring anyone without work experience. They may be even more skeptical about someone with a disability and no experience. Rather than risk giving an employer the impression that you are lazy or unskilled, you may choose to explain why you have not worked. However, if medical treatment or rehabilitation was involved, think carefully about how to explain this so the employer does not have the impression that you are sickly or require frequent hospital care.

Jill's experience:

Although I had hoped to work last summer, I had to have surgery to correct a condition that affected my balance. My recovery and therapy took most of the summer. Now my balance and endurance are much better. I had recovered enough by the end of the summer to take a 3 week course in Introductory Business at the high school's evening education program.

Why did you go to ____ training program, college or university?

When applicants are recent graduates, employers often ask questions about school since job experience is limited. This is a chance to address any concerns the employer may have about special training, education or vocational programs you attended. Stress the skills acquired from these programs.

Phil's experience:

I chose Brandon Community College because it has an excellent computer aided drafting program and a high placement rate of jobs for graduates. Their 3 semester certificate program allowed me choices to major in architectural, electronic or structural drafting.

Steve's experience:

I attended the Community Training Center because its programs and

schedule allowed me to start gradually while I was still recovering from my injury. By my last year there, I was attending 40 hours a week and earning $7 an hour on contract jobs.

Why are your grades low?

Some employers will ask about your high school or college grades. If they are low, you need to be prepared to explain why and how that might affect your ability to do the job. Emphasize any improvement in your grades and the strengths of your nonacademic skills.

Summary

Interviews are tense situations for almost everyone. As an interviewee, you are putting yourself "on the line." This can be harder to do, if you are disabled and have doubts about how you measure up against nondisabled peers. Preparation and rehearsal can help you conquer your nervousness.

Basic Rules for Successful Interviews

- √ Communicate clearly.
- √ Have a clean, well groomed personal appearance.
- √ Show interest and enthusiasm.
- √ Look at interviewer when talking.
- √ Be on time.
- √ Ask questions about the position.
- √ Give specific responses to questions.
- √ Be willing to start at the bottom.
- √ Have a neat application.
- √ Show confidence, be at ease.
- √ Ask for the job.

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Building a Network of Adult Services

When a person with a disability graduates from high school or turns 22, eligibility for special education services ends. The world of adult services is very different.

Because there is usually little coordination among these agencies and organizations, you - the person with a disability - have the task of linking them together to form a network of services that will enable you to live the fullest life possible. You can start learning about adult services while you are still in school.

Another complicating factor is that these agencies and organizations vary greatly from state to state. This is due to differences in state and Federal funding and regulations. The skills and experience of staff in local programs also vary. It is absolutely vital that you fully explore and evaluate the options in your area. Try to learn the names of contact people within each adult service organization, discover the range of services, and understand the minimum qualifications to receive services, the application process, and the limits of available services.

The overall picture will look like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle at first. Some organizations will not be able to provide any services or support. Others will supply vital pieces. There probably will be pieces missing in this puzzle. Building a supportive network requires linking together many agencies and organizations, identifying the missing pieces, and figuring out how to fill in the gaps.

Three important areas for living as an adult are: employment and training, housing and financial assistance.

Employment and Training

In most states, the primary organization responsible for working with persons with disabilities about employment is the vocational rehabilitation agency (VR). VR agencies receive some money from the Federal government's Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) which is part of the US Department of Education. Other funding comes from state government. The VR agency can provide assistance in many ways.

It can help a person with a disability figure out his or her vocational interests, aptitudes and abilities and develop a vocational plan. The vocational rehabilitation agency can help with tuition and books for additional education or training, transportation to school or training, adaptive equipment and physical modifications at home or work as long as they are related to the vocational plan.

Adaptive equipment can include things such as a voice activated computer for someone who is unable to use a regular keyboard or a TTY, which is a device that allows people with hearing loss to communicate over the telephone. Ramps and stair lifts are examples of physical modifications.

After helping with training, the vocational rehabilitation agency can help the person get a job. It encourages businesses to hire persons with disabilities by referring qualified applicants and providing information on tax incentives, such as write-offs for making modifications.

A job might consist of either competitive employment or "supported employment." In supported employment, a business agrees to hire a person with a disability with the understanding that the vocational rehabilitation agency will provide a job coach to train and supervise the person at the workplace. Over time, as the person learns to perform the job more independently, the job coach is phased out.

In addition, the vocational rehabilitation agency can connect clients to other job training programs, such as those of the US Department of Labor (DOL). One DOL program encourages businesses to hire employees with disabilities by paying part of the employee's wages during a specific training period. In return, the business agrees to provide the training and keep the individual on as a regular employee after the training period is over.

The state vocational rehabilitation agency is one link to the work world for the student after leaving school.

What a student says:

"I got to know my vocational rehabilitation counselor before I left high school. She was the person I went back to for help when my first job didn't work out."

What a parent says:

"The vocational rehabilitation agency was the place where we got information about all sorts of other services that our son was eligible for."

What a teacher says:

"The vocational rehabilitation counselors know a lot about the companies that actively hire persons with disabilities, and they know a lot about the other state and Federal agencies. We rely on the state VR personnel to help us identify resources for our students."

CAUTION

Most vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies have long waiting lists for services. Don't expect to get help quickly. Plan to be in regular contact if put on a waiting list ("the squeaky wheel does get the grease"). It is very important to apply early. An application to the state VR agency should be one of the first steps in the student's transition plan.

Housing and Residential Options

A safe, stable living situation is essential for getting and keeping a job. Getting a good job and moving out on your own are dreams that most students share. Achieving those goals quickly without much planning or support is rare for anyone, disabled or not.

What a student says:

"I wanted to be on my own and do what I wanted without my parents always butting in. But I lost my first job at a restaurant because I was getting to work late after watching TV all night."

What a parents says:

"We thought that he was doing so well after a few months on the job that he could handle the apartment. Then it all fell apart."

What a teacher says:

"I'm concerned that a student with a disability working and living independently after high school will find himself isolated and lonely."

CAUTION

Successful independent living requires balancing home, work, transportation, and social interests. A problem in one area can undo the entire plan. Changes should be made gradually with carefully planned support at each step.

Some persons with disabilities choose to live with their families, because they enjoy their help, security and companionship. For those who want to be more on their own or who must because of limited family support, there are various options.

For people who need 24 hour per day supervision, there are group homes. A group home offers a residence, meals and other services to six to eight individuals and trains them in daily living activities such as self-care, shopping and cooking, managing personal finances and leisure planning.

For individuals who need some supervision, but not on a 24 hour per day basis, there are supported living programs. In this kind of program, the person with a disability lives alone or with a roommate in an apartment, while training in daily living activities is provided as needed.

Those who don't need supervision can obtain rental assistance for living independently in their own apartments from state and Federal subsidized housing programs. In subsidized housing, the government pays a portion of the individual's rent. The amount of the subsidy is determined by the individual's income. The federal program is called Section 8 housing and is administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

People living in the community can receive independent living skills training in areas such as financial management, homemaking, self-advocacy and management of care providers. This training is provided by independent living centers, which are organizations run by and for people with disabilities for the purpose of promoting their ability to control their lives.

One important support for independent living is personal care assistance (PCA) services. These services provide money to persons with disabilities, so that they can hire and manage their own attendants, rather than receive institutional care. The money comes from Medicaid and other government sources and is administered by independent living centers and other social service agencies. PCA services are not available in all states, because they are not required by Federal law. Eligibility is based on income and on need for care.

Financial Assistance

Upon leaving school, many persons with disabilities will be unable to earn enough money to fully support themselves. This may be due to enrollment in post-high school training or college programs, physical or medical issues, fatigue or limited endurance. It also may be hard to find a job that pays enough. Financial planning is a vital component of any transition plan.

If you are unable to support yourself because of your disability, you may be eligible for cash benefits from the Federal government and your state. There are two main programs to investigate. The Social Security Administration (SSA) of the US Government runs the Social Security Disability Insurance program (SSDI). Eligibility for SSDI is based on two factors. The first is that your disability prevents you from earning a living. The second is that you formerly worked and paid Social Security taxes. You can also be eligible for SSDI if you have been disabled before age 22 and have a parent who is receiving Social Security or who was, and has since died. To find out about SSDI, contact your local SSA office.

The second program is called Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and uses a combination of state and Federal money. Eligibility for SSI is based on your inability to work and on your having little savings or other resources that could be converted into cash. To find out about SSI, contact your state's Department of Public Welfare.

People with disabilities often have very high medical costs. They may need special equipment, medications and treatment to manage their conditions. They may be unable to pay these costs themselves or pay for health insurance. Also, sometimes private health insurers will refuse to cover them because of preexisting conditions or because they consider their care too expensive.

The government has two programs that can help. Medicare is a Federal program that provides health care coverage to people receiving Social Security benefits. To find out more about Medicare, contact your SSA office.

Medicaid is a joint state and federal program that provides health care coverage to low income people. Anyone receiving SSI is eligible for Medicaid. To find out more about Medicaid, contact the Department of Medical Assistance within your state's Department of Public Welfare.

Families of children with disabilities often worry about what will happen after a parent's death or in case of long-term illness. If they have the means, they can provide for their children's future financial needs by setting up a trust. This is a legal arrangement for putting aside money for their children's later use. A trust has to be carefully set up by a lawyer, or else income from it could disqualify a child for government benefits.

In general, any kind of income, whether from work, interest on sav-

ings or dividends, can affect eligibility for benefits. So think carefully about your needs. If you work, can you earn enough to support yourself and pay for all your disability related expenses? Are there ways of reducing your expenses such as sharing housing, family support or private insurance?

To encourage you to work, SSA has special rules called "work incentives." For recipients of SSDI, there is a trial work period. This means that, when you first try going to work, your earnings will not affect your cash benefits. Even when the trial work period ends, you can continue to be eligible for Medicare for another 39 months. Also, certain expenses for things you need because of your disability in order to work can be deducted from your earnings when SSA determines whether you are doing substantial work and are, therefore, no longer eligible for benefits. Those receiving SSI can continue to get benefits until their income rises above certain limits.

Medicaid can usually continue even if you earn more than those limits, if you cannot afford similar benefits and depend on Medicaid in order to work. Disability related work expenses and money from scholarships or grants for vocational training can be deducted when figuring your countable income.

Another important incentive under SSI is called a "plan for achieving self support" (PASS). A PASS permits you to put aside money you intend to use to start a business or get a job. The money set aside will not reduce your SSI benefits. Using a PASS you could, for example, save money for tuition or to buy a car to commute to work. Your local SSA office and your state vocational rehabilitation agency are good sources of information about these work incentives.

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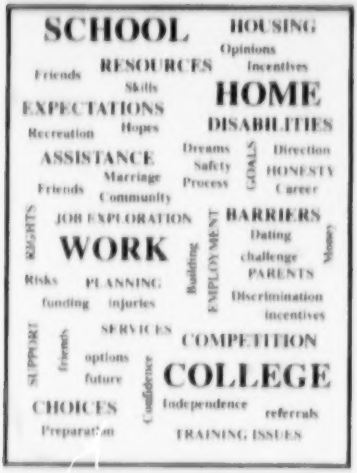
Conclusion



Every young adult has strengths and weakness, preferences and dislikes. The process of growing up is never easy. For a young adult with a disability, particularly one caused by an injury, this process may be unexpectedly more difficult.

It is important for you and your family to focus on the person that you are and not the disability. Your interests and skills will influence how you choose to spend your time and what kind of work you will do after you leave school - whether it is high school, a vocational program or college.

Society has a tendency to judge the success of a person by how much money is earned, by their lifestyle, job title, and accomplishments. Too often, young adults who are disabled feel that they "fall short" when they compare themselves to their peers. This is particularly true for young adults who were injured as they see their classmates and even their siblings move ahead of them.

The core of a person's success, however, is not in the external measures of salary and job titles. Rather, it is the individual's use of their unique skills and interests, their ability to maximize their strengths, and to recognize and respect their limitations. "Challenge" and "success" in the work world is a very personal and subjective experience. What challenges one person may bore another; the criteria for one person's success may be another's failure.

For the young adult who has been disabled by an injury, there can be many challenges - physical, cognitive, communicative, behavioral, social, and financial. Only you can decide what is meaningful, challenging and fulfilling for yourself. The yardsticks by which you measure your success are very personal. You may face challenges that are never imagined by persons who are not disabled. Take the time to know yourself, explore your options, learn from failures, and try again until you find the path that is best suited for you.